Broadband Planning for the Eastern Shore

Why, what did we discover, and what's next?

Why? Plan for what?

- Mid-Atlantic Broadband Cooperative is building a new fiber backbone on the Eastern Shore very soon (2008)

- Who will use it and for what?

- How will our communities benefit from the new backbone, and who will coordinate connections?

- Which community (or communities)should be connected first?

- What services are already available, and how satisfied are users with their current Internet service provider?

Planning activities to date

- Three planning grants from DHCD resulted in a July 31, 2007 Telecommunications study for Chincoteague/Wallops, Central Accomack County, and Exmore/Nassawadox areas (available at www.a-npdc.org/broadband.html)

- Another planning grant is getting underway for Northampton County south of Nassawadox. When completed, it will provide data for most of the Eastern Shore

Study highlights

- Are people satisfied with their Internet access?
  - Businesses - 69% somewhat satisfied to very dissatisfied.
    - Why? 42% Poor connection speed, not enough bandwidth
  - Residents – 46% not satisfied
    - Why? Desire for high-speed Internet access, frustration with lack of competition
    - 32% of Shore residents are on dial-up
- Businesses reported that, with higher-speed affordable access they could:
  - Increase advertising and marketing (30%)
  - Expand their current business (17%)
  - Offer additional services over the Internet (36%)

What's next for planning?

- MBC needs to know where community access points should be. How will we tell them?

- There may be enough funding to construct fiber backbone "spurs" into towns that are not located on Route 13.

  Which towns will have priority and why?

- MBC is a wholesaler, not a retailer. Open-access community distribution networks will need to be designed and built to connect the new fiber backbone with Internet retailers.

  Who will build, maintain, and own these networks?

- Demand for services needs to be aggregated and configured as an open-access network so that last-mile service providers (the retailers) will be interested in offering a wide-range of services and plans at an affordable price.

  Who will organize this?

Immediate Next Steps

- Identify service provider needs through an RFI
- Complete a detailed business plan
- Complete a Master Comprehensive Plan that will unite all of the needed planning and implementation elements in Towns to a regional perspective
- Continue the Education Committee and efforts to make computers more available to households (40% of Eastern Shore homes do not have a computer)

How will we move forward?

- The Broadband Management Team has requested that the A-NPDC consider being the interim agency that will coordinate connections with communities and the MBC.

- The Team also requested that the A-NPDC authorize them to research and make a recommendation as to what type of organization could be set up by law to build, own, operate and maintain open-access, community distribution systems—the "bridge" from MBC to the retailers.

Contact me for more information

Barbara Schwenk

Accomack-Northampton

Planning District Commission

757-787-2936 x115

bschwenk@a-npdc.org

www.a-npdc.org